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INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRT KUNDUZ: TALIBAN LAUNCHES SUCCESSFUL ATTACK IN
THE NORTH

11. (U) SUMMARY: Taliban have claimed responsibility for what may be the first successful suicide bombing in Afghanistan's northeastern provinces on April 16. A suicide bomber blew himself up among some 60 provincial police officers who were doing morning exercises in downtown Kunduz City at about 8:30 am. Initial accounts report at least nine police officers killed, and over 20 injured. No civilians or international forces were affected. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) At approximately 8:30 am on April 16, a suicide bomber reportedly exited a red Toyota Corolla, ran into the area where police were gathered, and detonated his bomb. According to press reports, Taliban commander Hayatullah Khan claimed responsibility and said there would be more attacks. "All of our suicide bombers are Afghans, and they are present in all Afghan cities and waiting for orders," he said. (Note: At this time we cannot confirm whether the bomber received any support from local sources. His leg and one ear were reportedly the only remains found on site. End note.)

13. (SBU) While Kunduz has seen other types of attacks, this incident may mark the first successful suicide bomb mission carried out by Taliban in the area. (Note: There was a February 2006 attack near an ISAF convoy that killed one person other than the bomber, but officials remain unsure whether it was a suicide attack or whether the bomber's bicycle was rigged, unbeknownst to him. End note.) Occasional small arms and rocket-propelled grenade attacks have been waged against ISAF convoys and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in Kunduz and surrounding provinces. There have also been periodic IED attacks against security forces, and several small IEDs have been planted near NGO or other international or Afghan civilian facilities. So far, the latter have been assessed as related to local disputes rather than organized by outside terrorist groups.

¶4. (SBU) The province has periodically received warnings of suicide bombers in the past. Two car bombs were discovered in Kunduz and successfully defused on August 15, 2006. At least one other intended car bomb has since been seized. Acting on tips and using checkpoints and searches, the local security forces (ANSF and NDS) have arrested several individuals and groups over the past six months. Security forces have also intercepted several loads of remote control devices and other bomb-making materials, as well as Korans and other innocuous items used to camouflage those materials.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: This incident marks the worst insurgent attack in the northeast since the ouster of the Taliban government in 2001. The Taliban has long tried to extend its terrorist campaign into the north (often reaching out to sympathizers among the local Pashtun communities) but with only marginal success until now. Bolstered by minimal support for Taliban in the region, the ANSF and NDS are proactive in following leads on planned attacks, making it difficult for outsiders to operate.

¶6. (SBU) Comment continued: This first successful suicide bombing undoubtedly will encourage others. References to the attacks being carried out by Afghans rather than foreigners reflect the Taliban's awareness that infiltration from outsiders will be less tolerated in the north than it has been in the south.

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